

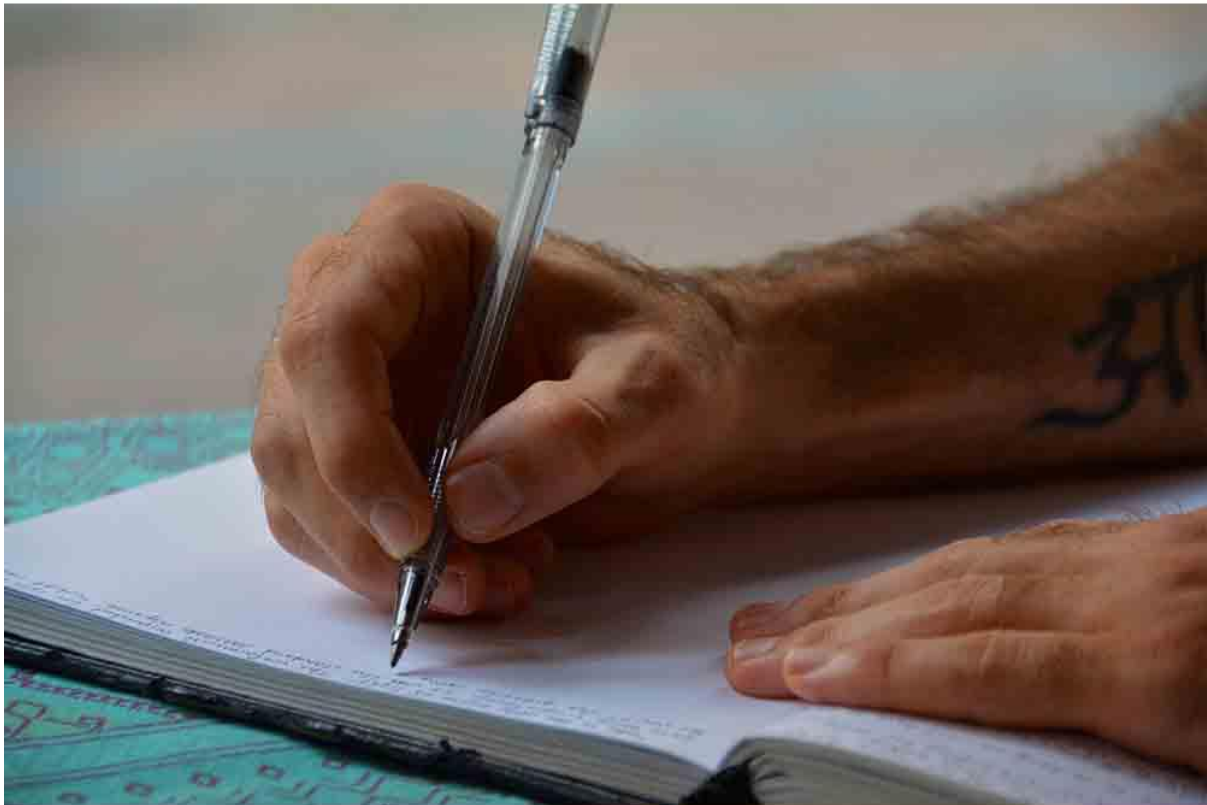
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Nissim Ezekiel: Alienation thanks to shattered nuptial bliss

Abstract

The present paper “Nissim Ezekiel: Alienation thanks to shattered nuptial bliss” deals with how poet’s alienation sprouts from the man–woman relationships. Thanks to alienation how his praise coated words for pious love are turned to be pinching satirical arrows. How he has presented the woman in different roles by mingling the heterogeneous material and spiritual themes.

Most importantly, present work not only offers the reader an indication of his poetic art, but also cheers him to think anew about the true nature of his felt alienation.

Keywords: alienation, faithlessness, love, nature, union.

The most important area of his felt alienation is the sphere of man-woman relationship and their love and sex activities. In his youth, he would consider love as a pious one. He used to think that we “are made for love alone”ⁱ so he wished that we should “keep our love as fresh as earth”.ⁱⁱ Like John Donne, Ezekiel would also consider the wedded love as the pious and best love, which also keeps the lovers in union:

Between the acts of wedded love
 A quieter passion flows,
 Which keeps the nuptial pattern firm
 As passion comes and goes,
 And in the soil of wedded love
 Rears a white rose.ⁱⁱⁱ

It does not mean that the poet feels no role of the body in love. In fact the body is said to “accept the geometry of love.”^{iv} This line has a deep similarity with John Donne’s following lines:

“Loves mysteries in soules do grow,
 But yet the body is his booke.”^v

But, being tortured by faithlessness and sexual crime, Ezekiel’s mind contemplates like Eliot’s. The domain of immorality and crime makes him puzzled. Here Ezekiel’s poetry coincides with Eliot’s “The Waste Land”. If Eliot sheds tears not due to any suffering of his own but for the sordid plight of the spiritually devoid hollow men or waste-landers, Ezekiel does the same. Ezekiel’s lines “Body nearly naked/On the beach”^{vi} are like Eliot’s “naked on the low damp ground.”^{vii} If Ezekiel’s female “Arrange(s) her limbs as he desires”^{viii} Eliot’s sex-bomb also helps the lover in sex as he desires “And

makes a welcome of indifference (Brackets mine)."^{ix} If Eliot's typist girl is nothing else but a "taxi-throbbing"^x due to sexual passions Ezekiel's female is but the "blazing animal"^{xi} owing to the same passions. If the hearts of the sweet ladies in Eliot's "The Waste Land" get relaxed by the sound of only "jug, jug..."^{xii} Ezekiel's female's lusty heart also gets relaxed by the sound of "Unhinging speech."^{xiii} If Eliot's waste-landers "are in rats' alley"^{xiv} Ezekiel's waste-landers are in a "muddy pool."^{xv} When the lover's finger-tips touch the "breast of harlots"^{xvi} and she thinks "How much of me you leave untouched"^{xvii}, the poet's heart aches with pain due to the violation of morality. He is so much shocked at the sexual crime that he calls the woman a stereotype of sex as: "naked Cuban dancer"^{xviii} "harlot of dream"^{xix} "a flickering lamp"^{xx}, "a leech"^{xxi} "sexual eyes"^{xxii}, "fish of sex"^{xxiii}, "threshing thighs and breasts"^{xxiv} "beast of sex"^{xxv} etc. Here, it seems that love is just a system for getting a girl to call her an inamorata after sex.

And here is a sordid female figure from "The Female Image", who is burning with lust. The very image tears all the morality of womankind into pieces:

She lies, the female image

On the lonely pillow, in the single room,

Incessantly reborn, rolling the senses

Down through several circles to the solid ice;

And empty palaces of fancy rise for her,

This harlot of a dream.

Shall her belly know the lust of Man?

And shall he be contented?^{xxvi}

Again the above lines are fairly similar to Eliot's following lines from "Preludes III"

You tossed a blanket from the bed,
 You lay upon your back, and waited,
 You dozed, and watched the night revealing
 The thousand sordid images
 Of which your soul was constituted;
 They flickered against the ceiling.
 And when all the world came back
 And the light crept up between the shutters
 And you heard the sparrows in the gutters,
 You had such a vision of a street
 As the street hardly understands;
 Sitting along the bed's edge, where
 You curled the papers from your hair,
 Or clasped the yellow soles of feet

In the palms of both soiled hands.^{xxvii}

In the poem "To a Certain Lady", the lover feels no pleasure in sexual exercise but it is one of the "tasteless encounters" to him and the lady has become a stereotype of a "leech":

Sucking like a leech upon the flesh,
 Crude acceptance of the need for one another,
 Tasteless encounters in the dark, daily
 Companionship with neither love nor hate.^{xxviii}

The protagonist's reaction to the woman's nature is below the moral codes. One can find that the way woman is described here is a sordid one. But as it may be, the poet persona is alienated even in sexual affairs. The "sweet sex" which is generally sweet to everyone and even so sweet that at times it leads the pious astray. But the very "sweet sex" does not seem wholly sweet to the poet:

That turgid drama, held
 In analytic order,
 Now seems serene.
 Sweet sex not wholly sweet
 Even in the day-dream.^{xxix}

In the poem "Nudes 1978", the lover knows that he loves his beloved's body, yet the nature of his beloved is not his cup of tea:

I love
 your body too, though you are hardly
 my cup of tea.^{xxx}

The game of love is not a simple one. To examine a lady's faith is utterly impossible. So the lover thinks that the sphere of love is full of darkness and loose morals. It is a small and trivial but habitual thing for a woman. She thinks that "Love is small, /a flickering lamp."^{xxxi} And owing to this fickle nature of woman the poet persona has gone mad in the game of love:

I have lost my reason—
 let it go.
 Did I create this woman,
 untameable and yet

willing to be tamed?^{xxxii}

Owing to this “Great woman-beast of sex”^{xxxiii} the poet is in complete anxiety and alienation and he finds her merely a “friendly-foe”^{xxxiv} and love remains only a myth and a dream. In this defiled and dehumanized atmosphere, the marital ties are as deceptive and hollow as the affair with a beloved or a harlot. The poet being disillusioned with sex thinks of himself as “an active fool”^{xxxv} whose very life “is like a muddy pool”^{xxxvi}

“I prepared for the worst. Married,
Changed Jobs, and saw myself a fool.”^{xxxvii}

Though marriage makes husband and wife one body but here it seems to be the grave or tomb of wit. It has so many pains that it appears to be a stormy lake. No one knows how many ordeals in the small circle of a wedding-ring lie! The poet persona also suffers a lot and the game of love and marriage reminds the reader of WB Yeats’s following lines:

Helen being chosen found life flat and dull
And later had much trouble from a fool,
While that great Queen, that rose out of the spray,
Being fatherless could have her way
Yet chose a bandy-legged smith for man.
It's certain that fine women eat
A crazy salad with their meat.^{xxxviii}

In fact the poet feels that marriage has no charm. These lines show that women are eccentric in their choice as well as by their nature and owing to this eccentricness all suffer; Prince Paris of Troy, Helen, WB Yeats, Mac Bride, Maud Gonne, Hephaestus, and even Aphrodite.

Ezekiel's inward voyage is the voyage of alienation. The theme of alienation in the poetry of Nissim Ezekiel encompasses simultaneously several levels of experience arising out of various sources of alienation.

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